

ABC WORLD NEWS TONIGHT
27 December 1983

REAGAN/BEIRUT
BOMBING

JENNINGS: President Reagan said today he took the full responsibility to stop the failure of the suicide attack which killed 240 servicemen in Beirut. That's exactly what you might expect the commander-in-chief to say. Mr. Reagan had just finished reading the results of a Pentagon investigation into that attack, and it finds there was inadequate security for the Marines and that the whole chain of command should take the blame. We begin with ABC's Mike von Fremd.

VON FREMD: After spending the weekend studying the Pentagon report, the president announced there is no one to blame but himself. REAGAN: If there is to be blame, it properly rests here in this office and with this president, and I accept responsibility for the bad as well as the good.

VON FREMD: The president explained that the Marines were up against a sophisticated state-sponsored terrorism for which they simply weren't prepared to deal with. REAGAN: I do not believe, therefore, that the local commanders on the ground, men who have already suffered quite enough, should be punished for not fully comprehending the nature of today's terrorist threat.

VON FREMD: But Senator Patrick Leahy on the intelligence committee insisted that the Marines and others must share some of the blame. SEN. PATRICK J. LEAHEY (D-Vt., Select Committee on Intelligence): I think the commission headed by Admiral Long is right when it says the military should bear some of the responsibility, but I would hope that it would not make the mistake of putting all the blame on the military at all, the military put in an impossible situation. There was a bad foreign policy decision.

VON FREMD: The president later flew to Los Angeles for a week's vacation, hoping that his decision to accept the blame would spare the country the painful process of hearings and reviews looking over and over again into just why it happened. But it doesn't appear that will completely be the case. Speaker Tip O'Neill has already received petitions from over 70 members of Congress asking that the attack on the Marines and the Reagan policy in the Mideast be the first order of business when the Congress returns. Mike von Fremd, ABC News, Los Angeles.

MCWETHY: This is John McWethy at the Pentagon. The president's intervention effectively drops any attempt by the military to formally discipline its officers for poor judgment prior to the Beirut bombing. While the bombing report produced by a commission headed by Ret. Admiral Robert Long has not yet been made available to the public, ABC News has learned that it sharply criticizes two of the on-the-ground commanders, Col. Timothy Garrity and Lt. Col. Howard *Gerlach, both Marines. Gerlach is still recovering from severe wounds received in the terrorist bombing. Pentagon sources say the Long Commission

CONTINUED

2.

criticized these officers because one of their primary responsibilities was to protect the lives of their men, and the report says they did not adequately do so. Government sources say the Long Commission report also contains the following findings. The terrorist bomb: A special FBI assessment of the truck bomb that destroyed Marine headquarters found that the explosive charge was far more than the equivalent of 12,000 pounds of TNT as estimated by other specialists, that it was the largest conventional explosive ever seen by government bomb experts, even in war. The report also found that the detonating mechanism was among the most sophisticated ever used by terrorists. All this leads experts to conclude that the terrorists were supported by powerful groups or governments. Rules of engagement: Military sources say the Long Commission found great confusion among officers and men about what they could and could not do to protect themselves, the so-called rules of engagement. Intelligence: Sources say the Long Commission was sharply critical of the Carter administration for gutting the CIA's ability to gather intelligence, for ruining networks of informants and spies that could provide early warning of attacks. The report also found that the Marines were flooded by wire intelligence and had little ability to interpret or process it. What emerges from all of this is a picture of American fighting men who were sent to perform a mission that is poorly defined and for which they were inadequately trained, all against a suicidal enemy that even the experts don't understand. John McWethy, ABC News, the Pentagon.